



# **Success Story**

Delaware District Office

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## **Government Contracting Puts Milford Firm on National Stage**

By Kai Brunswick

Nat Simmons knows government contracting. In just 10 years, his Milford-based Systems Integration and Management, Inc., (SIM) leveraged its military contracts to grow from a one person consulting business into a multi-faceted company with 140 employees.

SIM provides support in engineering, financial and technical management, and testing for the Space and Naval Warfare Systems. With major customers such as the Navy, Marine Corps, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Missile Defense Agency, the company's multiple government contracts now average between \$15 -18 million annually.

SIM's projected revenues for 2004 are expected to reach \$24.5 million, but that can soon change. The company was recently awarded the Business, Operations and Administration Support Services (BOASS) contract from the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command Information Technology Center. The five-year 8(a) contract has an estimated value in excess of \$65 million.

SIM prides itself on its mission of offering rapid response and product consistency to its clients. In fact, much of its success is due to the company's organizational structure. Simmons recognized early on the need for SIM to offer hands-on project management if it wanted to succeed as a prime contractor. As a result, many of SIM's employees are stationed on-site at military operations in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, California, Louisiana, and Florida.

Simmons started SIM in 1994 within a week of retiring from the Navy. During his last tour of duty he was stationed at the Navy Sea System Command (NAVSEA) in Washington, where he gained extensive experience in the life cycle of weapons systems, from the design to manufacturing and purchasing stages. He leveraged his knowledge into the start-up operations of SIM and quickly secured a subcontract with a larger prime contractor to provide program management support to various Naval Systems Acquisition Commands throughout the Department of Defense.

In 1996, SIM was certified as an 8(a) contractor in the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Business Development Program. The program provides business development and contracting assistance for small, disadvantaged businesses interested in breaking into the federal contracting arena.

"The SBA Delaware District Office has been a vital element in the success of Systems Integration & Management," said Simmons. He credits the 8(a) program for exposing him to business development tools that supported SIM's business growth.

Simmons landed his first 8(a) contract a year later, resulting in the hiring of 20 employees and a new office in Charleston, South Carolina. He quickly recognized that his success in the government marketplace depended on the company's aggressive marketing efforts on the national level.

As he identified other Navy commands in need of enhanced technology, he marketed SIM's alternative solutions. The extensive marketing resulted in more contracts and more jobs. Working with Navy installations in Washington, D.C., Charleston, SC, and Chesapeake, Va., SIMs expanded to over 80 employees. The nature of the work even carried over to ships and their command centers stationed in international waters.

It didn't take long for the business community to take notice. In 2003 Washington Technology Magazine recognized SIM as one of the top 25 8(a) federal prime contractors to watch. And the SBA will honor Simmons as Delaware's Minority Small Business Person of the Year during the agency's Minority Entrepreneurial Development (MED) Week.

Simmons endured two personal tragedies in 1995 that nearly sidetracked the business. But facing adversity is nothing new to entrepreneurs. He channeled his loss into the growth of SIM and today uses his success to give back to the community. In 1996 he founded the Simmons Memorial Foundation to honor his late wife and oldest son who passed away a year earlier. The foundation offers educational support programs to rural disadvantaged children, focusing on Kent and Sussex Counties. It empowers youth to look beyond their current circumstances and take advantage of resources and opportunities to secure promising futures.

One of the foundation's most successful programs is its college mentoring program that recruits graduate students and young professionals from top universities to share their strategies for success with the young participants. Students once hesitant to expand their horizons are now attending some of the most prestigious colleges in the nation.

According to Simmons, his late wife and son were ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Their legacies have inspired the foundation's grass roots emphasis. It is a lasting lesson that this entrepreneur takes to heart. After all, it is from the grass roots level that Simmons built SIM into one of the nation's leading government contractors. Just another ordinary entrepreneur doing extraordinary things in the name of small business success.

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